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# AFTER VIOLENCE

RELIGION, TRAUMA AND RECONCILIATION



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# INTRODUCTION

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*After Violence:* The title of this volume provokes controversy.

There have been significant moments in history which have marked the official end of atrocities such as the Shoah, the end of the genocide in Rwanda, or the end of systemic, state-sponsored racism, represented in Apartheid in South Africa. These particular moments in history mark significant turning points. And yet, many historians, sociologists, psychoanalysts, and theologians who study the effects of collective trauma in the aftermath of atrocities doubt that there has ever been a clear-cut »after violence situation« in the sense that the impact of the past has been overcome. Rather, the violence unleashed in various forms of warfare and systemic injustice does not simply disappear once a war or a dictatorship is officially ended. The effects of violence continue to live on powerfully in both psychic processes and in communal and personal relationships. Living in the aftermath of violence thus often means the emergence of further or new forms of violence as collective trauma unfolds.

This volume explores religious, cultural, and political resources geared towards addressing the complex aftermath situations of collective atrocities. Major practices are critically analyzed, such as public witnessing and truth telling, as well as ritual and aesthetic practices of remembrance. The authors consider religious practices, theological reflections, and cultural resources which hold the potential to address the aftermath of violence in constructive ways. Biblical narratives, symbols, and rituals that address the experience of trauma come into play. Grounded in their particular contexts, the authors investigate and analyze liturgical as well as theological traditions that grapple with the task of reconciliation, political and cultural initiatives that seek to work through conflicts, and the ambivalences of memorials dedicated to the victims of collective atrocities. The essays are mindful of the ambiguous roles

that churches have played in many of these conflicts, either by partially promoting acts of violence or by tolerating them. Many reflections take into account that theological reflections and religious practices have failed to address the issues at hand in constructive and life-giving ways.

The authors ask what it means to open up spaces of remembrance and mourning which interrupt the mimetic reproduction of violence. If the realities of trauma are taken into account, practices of remembrance and reconciliation appear as a particular challenge. Yet, from a Christian perspective, theological insights on the transformation of violence and the necessity of remembrance are at the heart of the Gospel. Jewish thinkers emphasize the role of memory on the path towards redemption. For Buddhist practice, it is pivotal to perform particular rites for the dead so that their souls may be released. Christian theologians ponder what it means to reflect on divine reconciliation and the restitution of human relationships in the light of collective atrocities.

The inquiries in this field have to be grounded in theoretical and theological reflections as well as in attentiveness with regard to concrete contexts and lived experience. Consequently, an array of situations in the aftermath of violence are explored, including post-Apartheid South Africa, Rwanda after the Genocide, postcolonial New Guinea, Ireland and Northern Ireland since the 'Good Friday Agreement', Argentina after militarist rule, Western Africa after civil wars, and Germany after the Shoah.

We have invited colleagues from various disciplines to address the questions raised. They represent fields such as performance studies, francophone literature and literary theory, history, systematic theology, liturgical studies, practical theology, religious studies, ecumenical theology, and missiology. The writers come from a wide range of Christian traditions, including Roman Catholic, Mennonite, Lutheran, and Reformed. Brigitte Sion is a Jewish scholar who also reflects on a Buddhist context. Theodor Ahrens draws on indigenous practices in Papua New Guinea.

Tinyiko Sam Maluleke frames the conversation by posing the fundamental question: Is it ever possible to declare a state of »after« violence? The author grew up in times of severe repression and comprehensive structural violence in South Africa under the Apartheid regime. From this perspective, he critically assesses the notion of »after violence«. Even after the end of Apartheid, Maluleke deems a perspective »after violence« to be both romanticizing and cynical in light of the massive physical, sexual, and psychological violence permeating South African society today. In his view, »after violence« is just the beginning of a new »pre-violence«. Maluleke disputes the



analytical value of a linear time-structure which differentiates between a *before*, *during*, and *after* with respect to violence. Only in eschatological perspective is it viable to maintain the concept of »after violence«. From this perspective, Maluleke retraces the steps of social change after the peaceful revolution of 1994. He evaluates the ambiguities and shortcomings in the work of truth commissions, their importance to the public appearance of today's South Africa notwithstanding.

The second part of the book maps the complicated terrain of theologies and practices of remembrance that seek to address the aftermath of collective atrocities.

Andrea Bieler reflects on remembering violence as a practice by taking into account psychoanalytical and theological insights from trauma studies. If processes of forgetting are a means of survival, what does it mean to remember atrocities at all? Bieler explores what it takes to return to wounds that are actually inaccessible in an immediate sense and what it means to shape practices of remembrance that are respectful of the dead and life-giving to the survivors, and that make visible the misdeeds of the perpetrators and of those who lived lives in between. In light of current research on collective trauma, Bieler revisits Christian traditions, such as the Eucharist, the time-space of Holy Saturday, and the invocation of the Holy Spirit as Paraclete. She claims that these traditions imply the potential to hold experiences of trauma as a space between death and life.

Brigitte Sion invites the reader to explore three memorial sites erected to the victims of state-sponsored violence: the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, the Monument to the Victims of State Terrorism within the Park of Memory in Buenos Aires, and the Choeung Ek killing fields in Phnom-Penh. These three sites, located in Germany, Argentina, and Cambodia, reflect very divergent historical and political circumstances as well as cultural and religious environments. Yet, they share in common the absence or the destruction of the bodies of the people who have been murdered and who could not be buried. Sion explores the social drama that unfolds at these sites, seeking to honor and remember the dead whose absent or destroyed bodies hint at unimaginable collective atrocities. As a scholar who focuses on performance practices, Sion is especially interested in the interaction of visitors with these sites.

Jean-Pierre Karegeye, who is the co-founder of the Genocide Research Center in Kigali (Rwanda), concentrates his research on the question of how this enormous outburst of massive collective violence could occur in a country that consists mainly of a Christian population. In his essay, he focuses on

a series of letters that were issued by Roman Catholic bishops during the war. In a close intertextual reading, Karegeye demonstrates the influence of the political rhetoric, especially of the former President Habyarimana, that prepared the stage for genocide. In disturbing ways, this political rhetoric undergirded the messages of the bishops as they were speaking of unity, peace, and reconciliation. This intricate convolution of political and religious speech turned into an uncanny support of governmental perspectives by the church. In light of this intertextual analysis, Karegeye emphasizes that it is pivotal for the future of African theologies to address issues of complacency of the church in thorough ways. This necessary critique challenges basic assumptions about ecclesiology and about reconciliation. It implies a kind of memory work that calls for a radical paradigm shift in doing theology in countries such as Rwanda as the genocide is put at the center of contextualizing theology.

Liberia continues to be traumatized by the fourteen-year-long war that ended in 2003; everyone feels victimized in some way. Sabine Förster uses portraits to depict different groups affected by the war. She writes of the men recruited by warlords and the use of 'jungle names' to separate their sense of themselves from the unspeakable atrocities they committed in the war. She writes of the female fighters, often left destitute and isolated after the war, with no way to reintegrate into their communities, either because their breach of the taboo against women doing battle was too great for others to accept or because the defined female roles in their communities were solely the traditional ones they had escaped by joining the fighters. She writes of women forced to flee their villages and of the Women in White, who protested for peace and eventually insisted the men reach a peace agreement in 2003.

Alongside the shocking narratives of the trauma and devastation of the war and its aftermath, Förster presents evidence of healing: cathartic worship services where people share their stories, women's groups helping each other overcome feelings of isolation and shame, church-sponsored training programs, and men serving as change agents in their communities. She underscores the need for improvement in justice and equality among men and between men and women in order for true change to occur in the country. She also suggests the importance of a deepening theological reflection on the image of God in Liberia and its effect on men and women. She insists churches, as community-based organizations, can have a vital role in creating spaces of safety.

In Australia, the tradition of celebrating Anzac Day has changed since the last soldiers of First World War died and took their personal histories with

them, shifting the commemoration from an occasion to mourn violence and war to a triumphal and celebratory one. In a thoughtful discourse on the ethical dimensions of history and the construction of narrative memories and national identity, Phillip Tolliday explores the development of Anzac Day from its earliest years until the present in the context of social forces, such as the rise of nationalism and the glorification of militarization. He illuminates how the re-construction of Anzac Day not only is untrue to history but also dangerously elides competing interpretations of Australia's Aboriginal history and the white supremacy of the early Australian leaders. He suggests that rather than elevating the Anzacs to a god-like status, remembering that they fought for male, white, imperial freedoms could shed light on contemporary immigration issues as well as lead the nation to a critical consciousness of such commemorative practices.

Hans-Martin Gutmann is a practical theologian of Lutheran persuasion who is deeply invested in the question of how the mimetic power of reciprocity can work to evoke the gift of grace instead of reciprocal violence. He is especially interested in exploring practices that embody the communication of the Gospel in which grace is poured out as abundant life offered to all by God. Such practices are geared to inspire a religiously grounded sense of mutual commitment. He engages pastoral counseling as a practice in which traumatization might be addressed. Drawing on insights of Luise Reddermann, a specialist in trauma therapy, he sketches out a process in which the imaginative engagement with biblical narratives along with body energy work might serve as transformative impulses. This process might aim at a protected re-framing of the self *in* the violent situation without being drawn back into the vulnerable place of trauma.

Werner Kahl's essay concludes the section on trauma and memory as he shares insights from his experiences with worship services and biblical interpretations in West African Migrant Churches in Germany. Migrants coming from West Africa to Germany have oftentimes left situations of violence in their home countries with the hope of finding a better life in Europe. Most often, they were escaping from civil war, poverty, and a sense of spiritual violence in which poverty is understood as a curse. Coming to Germany, the majority is confronted with new forms of racism and various forms of exclusion. Kahl describes how in worship services the desire for spiritual killings emerges as the congregants are invited to pray to Jesus for saving them from spiritual missiles sent by family members from Ghana and by returning these missiles to the senders, potentially causing their death. Kahl explores the reasons for such a ritual practice by engaging sub-Saharan worldviews

concerning the impact of evil spirits on the community and biblical interpretations arising in that context. From there, he moves on to present some insights on dealing with violence from his reading of New Testament texts, as he seeks to engage a dialogue about the abovementioned practices.

The third part of the book explores the fragile path towards reconciliation and healing in the aftermath of violence. At times, people are led astray and return to old patterns of exclusivist views; at times, small steps towards the mending of broken relationships are taken. In these ambiguous situations, the question about the meaning of divine reconciliation emerges.

The 1998 Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland brokered a political peace for an ethno-nationalist conflict, but it did not address religion, an arena of life that harbors the most pernicious old habits of division and animosity as well as the most hopeful opportunities for genuine reconciliation in Northern Ireland. Presenting findings from her seven-year study of Protestant and Catholic churches in the Republic and Northern Ireland, Siobhán Garrigan observes that while church communities often prayed for nations and peoples in other parts of the world, any mention of Ireland or Northern Ireland was strikingly absent in the prayers, rituals and community celebrations of the church year. Moreover, language in worship in both Catholic and Protestant churches often subtly or strongly created *otherness* in mentioning the *opposite* religion. Garrigan maintains that the adage taught school children in England and Ireland, »forgive and forget«, is inadequate until true forgiveness and reconciliation has occurred. She suggests a thoughtful interrogation and reframing of language used in worship could illuminate what has been prematurely »forgotten«, name new realities and truths, and help bring about forgiveness. She also calls upon the strength of the practice of honoring anniversaries in Irish culture as she proposes that honoring significant anniversaries in recent Irish history needs to be added to the liturgical year. Garrigan concludes that this kind of memory work needs to happen in worship also, so that a culture of casual forgetting can be challenged.

Theodor Ahrens presents a case study from the Western Highlands in Papua New Guinea, in which he focuses on a group of Melpa-speaking clans who live under the conditions of a post-colonial state. Ahrens explores how modified traditional ritualized forms of conflict management are in competition with the legal system of the nation state, and actually at times deteriorate the legal jurisdiction of the state. Simultaneously, these rituals carve out a space of experimentation in which the Melpa Lutheran Church offers models for the restriction of violence by drawing on biblical resources as well as traditional spiritual practices. Ahrens interprets interventions of Bishop

Sanangke Dole and his mediation teams as constructive examples of how potentially violent reciprocity between members of different clans can be constrained and transformed into a situation of non-violent coexistence.

Fernando Enns looks back upon the Decade to Overcome Violence, which had been proclaimed by the WCC in 2001 and which concluded in the international ecumenical peace convocation in Kingston, Jamaica, in May 2011. True to its name, its vision was to begin processes to actually overcome violence and to achieve peace here and now. Among the efforts made was the project »Peace to the City«, in which seven cities were chosen to form a laboratory of »best practice-initiatives« to respond to challenges of violence: Belfast (Northern Ireland), Boston (USA), Colombo (Sri Lanka), Durban (South Africa), Kingston (Jamaica), Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), und Suva (Fiji). For an array of reasons, each of these cities is exceptionally engaged in the vicious circles of violence and retaliation. Enns theologically interprets the very efforts to overcome violence as illustrated by the »Peace to the City« initiative, stating that its efforts are no mere ethical consequence of the reconciliation of God with its creation. Rather, they are its very manifestation. The gift of reconciliation is realized wherever churches take part in the sanctification of life, in building positive relationships among people, and in confronting violence, enmity, and injustice.

Ulrike Link-Wieczorek revisits Anselm of Canterbury's theory of satisfaction as she teases out the connection between divine reconciliation and human restitution in light of experiences of massive structural violence. She emphasizes that, in this context, the meaning of the coming of Christ as bringing about once-and-for-all salvation and forgiveness of sins for all humankind needs to be spelled out anew. The Christ event has at its center the gift of reconciliation. What this means, however, needs to be an open question. Link-Wieczorek turns to Anselm's contested satisfaction theory. This is a surprising move since Anselm's theory has been interpreted as implying a rather rigid and retributive sense of divine righteousness which might even promote the idea that the killing of the Son was necessary for the damaged honor of the Father to be restored. Link-Wieczorek argues against this interpretation by situating Anselm's theory within a theology of creation which seeks to reflect the damages done to creation and creatures, touching upon God's own vulnerability.

The volume concludes with a brief response by Anne Wehrmann and Laura Koch, who served as student observers at the conference.